

By Annie Kincaid

# 'Beyond Landscape'

*"I spread my dreams across the face of a canvas to enlighten those who would know the spirit and the ways of the earth, but with my limited knowledge, I am able to only scratch the surface of the vast universe of knowing." So says Rod Bearcloud Berry, renowned Native American artist.*

With the blinding pace that most of us run our lives, it isn't always easy to see the forest for the trees. As a result we miss the opportunities to enjoy all that we have passed at the dead run. But then there are some people who make it their goal to experience as much of their existence as they can, Bearcloud is such a person.

Bearcloud, a soft spoken 41 year-old, was born into the Wah-sha-she nation and raised in Amarillo, Texas. "I was always drawing pictures when I was supposed to be doing my homework." Bearcloud remembers his first painting was completed with the help of a paint-by-numbers set.

By the time he was 13, he had decided to devote his life to his art. And although his formal studies include 4 years at the University of Maryland, England. His best teachers are probably those he finds in the ever changing landscapes from the mountains of Colorado to the southwest desert areas of Arizona and New Mexico, which he still visits at least two times a year. Bearcloud feels drawn to New Mexico. He says,

*"there is a phenomenon there where the sky turns crystal clear blue—a violet-blue." A visionary artist, he considers the southwest deserts "Sacred Ground".*

When asked how he receives his inspiration for his paintings, he says, "my art arrives from the visions that come to me through the sacred pipe and other ceremonies. I try to do things in the spirit way. I get a great deal of strength, knowledge and balance from the

person. One day he showed up, looked at it and said, 'I gotta take back that feather.' I loved the feather and used it in ceremonies, but it had apparently come from a Sioux medicine man and had been passed down from generation to generation. It came from a ceremonial lodge and was one of a set of four. 'But I need that feather,' I told him. But he said that a lot of people would be helped by its return, so I let him take it. I

*"I feel very fortunate to have this gift that has been given to me."*

*ceremonies. I like to take that and put it in my artwork where others can feel it and see it."*

During his ceremonies he calls upon spiritual Guides and "Ancient Ones" for assistance. "If I am outside," he explains, "the spirits in the clouds may appear to me, or I'll find an ancient one in the rocks, or a spirit in the cloud." These are all symbols that mean very much to Bearcloud.

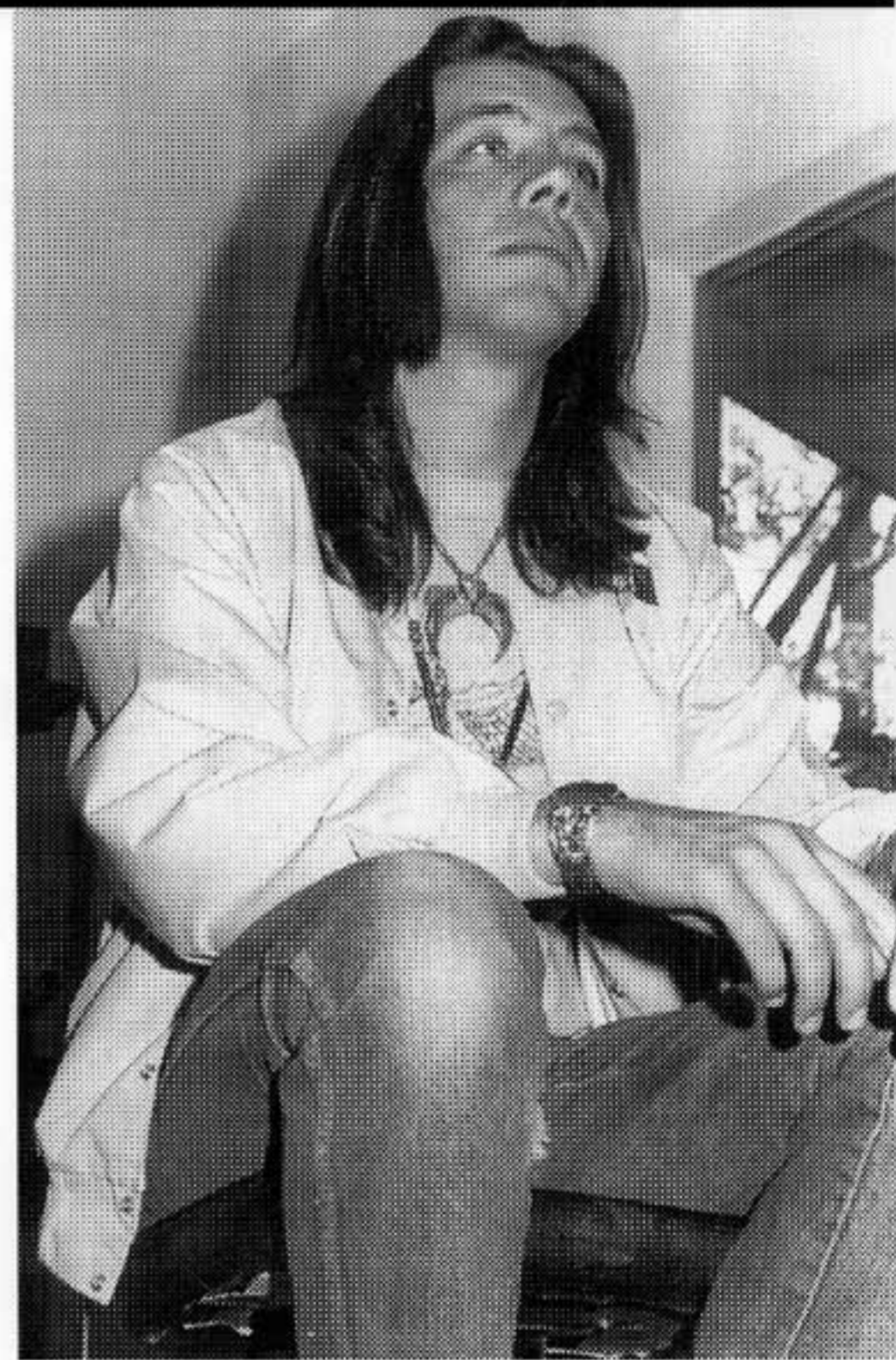
As the opportunity to learn to paint and a place to work presented themselves, said Berry, so do other aspects of his life. "With the Indian way" he said, "things come to you as you need them." He recounted his experience:

*"A feather was given to me a few years ago. The guy who gave it to me was given it by another*

*felt like a piece of my soul was gone. The very next day, that following afternoon in fact, a guy came walking through the door and said, 'I'm supposed to give you this feather.' I asked him who told him to give it to me, and he answered, 'nobody told me, I'm just supposed to give it to you.' I must be doing things right."*

Bearcloud translates these visions to canvas in his studio which is housed at the Bearcloud Gallery, but he shows more than just his work there. You can browse through jewelry, pottery, rugs, baskets and artifacts from many native American tribes.

Mi-wok Indian museum is also featured, with historical photos artifacts and costumes depicting the local Mi-wok heritage and



VISION teams with craft for the artist, whose roots go back to Southwestern skies billowing with thunderclouds

culture.

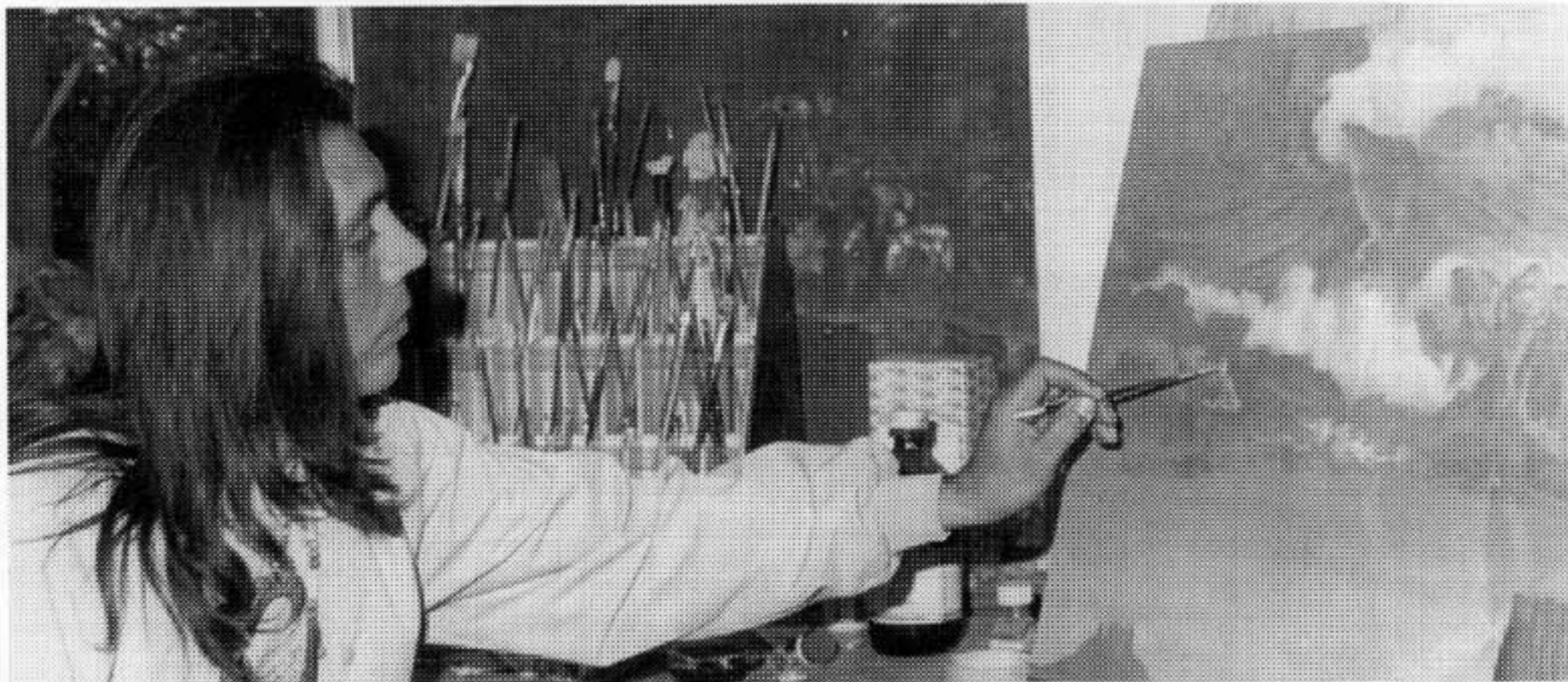
In viewing the gallery we do also see works by Bearcloud... Swirl of Smoke, Spirits Touching and Call of the Eagle Spirit, which is awesome in scope and grandeur yet simple in very human terms. As with most of Bearcloud's works, the longer you look, the more you actually see, says Bearcloud "The more you get balanced and in-tune with nature,

*the spirit helpers begin to show themselves one at a time and so in my painting the more in touch and balanced one gets with the artwork, the spirit helpers will show themselves one by one."*

When asked if he had a personal message for our readers, he replied, "Yes, there are a lot of different ways to find balance and peace, a lot of religions and ways to accomplish that. I think a lot of people are doing that today. I, in the Indian way, the Taoist Priest in his, and you in yours. All tap into the Universal Consciousness; messages, if one listens very closely, can be found on the wind."

It is the wondrous fruition of his vision that has helped Bearcloud's reputation as an artist grow at a "startling pace" during the last couple of years. "It's accelerated way beyond my expectations," he said, "I feel very fortunate to have this gift that has been given to me."

Bearcloud is Wah-sha-she, but the short and more easily pronounced version of that is Osage, which means "The Tall Ones." At 6'2", Bearcloud considers himself a bit short of his namesake. But after our interview, I felt that he fills his shoes on a Grand Scale!



SITTING BACK for perspective, Bearcloud works on his latest painting, "Call of the Eagle Spirit," in his studio-trading post in Columbia, California.